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Raising of the Participation Age in the UK: The dichotomy between full participation and institutional accountability

Raising of the Participation Age in the UK: The dichotomy between full participation and institutional accountability

The economic context facing young people has changed significantly over the last three decades with young people having to negotiate a different path to adulthood than their parents. At a time of mass youth unemployment, the introduction of the raising of the participation age (RPA) policy advocates the positive benefits of a prolonged period of education and training for all young people. As part of the policy, accountability was placed on schools and local authorities for its implementation, with government imposed destination measures being used as an indicator of the policy's success. This paper argues that the RPA policy will have little impact on young people who are not in education, employment and/or training (NEET) and that the accountability for the policy's implementation is at best problematic and at worse fundamentally flawed.

Keywords: Raising of the participation age; NEET; accountability; further education; local authorities; schools.

Introduction

This paper presents a critical analysis of the UK government's aspirations for full participation of young people aged 16-18 and its impact on institutional accountability. Unlike previous works that have compared the United Kingdom's context for participation and those of other countries, this paper focuses on the accountability framework needed to achieve full participation. After which the paper will also consider the yet unresolved tension between the participation policy and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Furthermore, this participation policy is being introduced at a time when the economic context facing young people has changed significantly over the last three decades (Mackie and Tett 2013), with young people having to negotiate a different path to adulthood than their parents. Arnett (2006) suggests that for some young people this represents a time of opportunity to travel and

to seek personal fulfilment prior to settling into adult life. For others the current economic context makes the uncertainty of opportunities even more of a reality (Southcott et al. 2013). This path to adulthood is typically characterised through the transition from school to work, from adolescence to adulthood, from dependence to independence, all of which are tightly interwoven in and through the lives of young people growing up (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000). Yet this transition to adulthood manifests itself through changing identities, efficacy and self-esteem which are informed by three key areas of a young person's life, primarily their social, domestic and economic contexts. This is very different from the simple, de-socialised, rational discourse of the policies which frame post-compulsory education and training, such as the Leitch Review (Leitch 2006) or Raising the Participation Age (RPA) legislation (Education Act 2011). These policies use a pervasive discourse presenting education as crucial to maintaining a workforce enabling the country to remain economically competitive with the pan-Asian economies (Bottery 2004). In 2004 Charles Clarke, the then Secretary of State for Education, and Gordon Brown, the then Chancellor of the Exchequer, as members of the New Labour (UK) government commissioned an independent review of the future skills needs of the workforce (Leitch 2006), which concluded that in order to compete economically with the emerging tiger economies (Bottery 2004) the country needed a workforce qualified to level three standards (equivalent to UK A-levels, US and Canadian High School Diploma at the end of twelfth grade or the National Certificate of Educational Achievement in New Zealand).

NQF	Example UK qualifications	Equivalent International qualifications
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Entry Level	Foundation Learning Functional Skills at Entry Level	
Level 1	GCSEs grade D-G NVQ level 1	
Level 2	GCSEs grade A*-C NVQ level 2	O-levels
Level 3	AS/A-levels BTEC Nationals	High School Diploma (US, Canada) NCAE (New Zealand)

Table One: Qualification levels

In order to facilitate young people continuing their education so that they can achieve level three qualifications (see table one), the New Labour government, (through section 42 of the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009) introduced the statutory duty to participate in education and training; commonly called raising of the participation age. The incoming Coalition government continued with this policy through section 74 of the Education Act 2011. The UK Centre for Employment Studies has since largely discredited the findings of the Leitch (2006) review (UKCES 2011) arguing that the economy still needs skills below level three, but they also recommend that there should be an emphasis on higher level apprenticeships which would enable progression for those individuals who wish to develop higher level skills.

In order to successfully implement the raising of the participation age policy, which requires young people to participate in education and/or training up to their eighteenth birthday, the dichotomy between this policy and the accountability of schools and local authorities for the participation of young people needs to be better understood. This paper critically examines the raising of the participation age policy and draws on inferences from Canada, Australia and The Netherlands, all of which have implemented similar policies on young people's participation in education.

Subsequently, the paper focuses on the accountability surrounding the implementation of the policy and suggests that a single dimension approach is insufficient, instead arguing that a multi-dimensional framework better supports the aspirations for full participation.

The rationale for raising of the participation age

In order to better understand the challenges presented by a policy that promotes full participation it is important to understand the context in which it was conceived. The rationale for raising of the participation age was outlined in the former New Labour government's Green Paper '*Raising Expectations: Staying in Education and Training Post-16*' (DfES 2007) and subsequently the Education and Skills Act (2008) proposed increasing the age that young people are expected to remain in learning in England to seventeen from 2013 and eighteen from 2015. The Green Paper (DfES 2007) argued that prolonged participation in education and training, post compulsory schooling age, would not only improve young people's attainment and qualifications, but lead to increased future earning potential for individuals, together with the ability to gain sustainable employment and, consequently make an economic contribution to society (Maguire 2013; Spielhofer et al. 2007; Oreopoulos 2006; Leigh and Ryan 2005;). Other proposed benefits include increased self-esteem through improved attainment and the opportunity to gain qualifications in specific occupational sectors related to employment aspirations, enhanced social mobility through increased earning potential and, improved social justice through fostering personal well-being and a reduction in anti-social behaviour (Woodin et al. 2013). Arguably, the perceived benefits of raising of the participation age help to prevent young people from becoming socially excluded through unemployment and being NEET (not in education, employment, education or training) (Roberts 2011).

Maguire (2013) highlights the continued focus of research and policy interest in young people in the UK who are NEET, which has been compounded by the national and international economic downturn and the rise in youth unemployment. It is, therefore, not surprising that a policy based on young people's participation has been introduced and that Kewin et al. (2009) note, that historically large-scale programmes including: 'Skills Conditionality', 'Get Britain Working' and the 'Support Contract', as well as raising of the participation age, coincide with mass unemployment, (in this case) youth unemployment. While the Department for Education highlights the positive benefit of a prolonged period in education, the Audit Commission (2010) has highlighted the social and economic impact on young people and society of being NEET. Primarily young people who are NEET are five times more likely to have a criminal record; three times more likely to have depression; six times more likely to have lower level qualifications and subsequently lower earning potential resulting in losses in tax revenue and an increase in the cost of benefits to the government, and ultimately tax payers (Audit Commission, 2010). This idealised accounting model led to the claim that:

The additional costs for each cohort of young people who participate to 18 due to RPA is £774m... Compared to the current 90% participation aspiration, the additional economic benefit of all young people participating is around £2,400m for each cohort (DCSF 2007, 12).

While the Audit Commission (2010) identified the social and economic cost of being NEET, Dickerson (2006) further suggests that pursuing vocational qualifications does not yield the same economic benefits as academic qualifications and that the benefits of studying at below level 2 (see table one – equivalent to UK GCSE [general certificate in secondary education] A*-C) are negligible.

Raising of the participation age across the globe

Although New Labour's Green Paper (DfES 2007) put forward a clear rationale for implementing a 'raising of the participation age' policy and the perceived benefits to young people and the state, the UK is not alone in introducing a policy to encourage prolonged participation in education and/or training in order to prevent young people becoming NEET. Compulsory education in the Netherlands ends at age sixteen, after which young people must participate for at least two days per week in education or training until they are seventeen. Coupled with this is the need for young people to have reached a minimum-level of qualification. Those not achieving this by age sixteen are expected to continue in full-time education until they are seventeen, prior to commencing their one year of part-time education and training in a specific occupational sector which is designed to ensure that all young people have the appropriate skills to enter employment. In 2005, legislation introduced in Ontario and New Brunswick in Canada required young people to participate in education or other approved learning, such as apprenticeships, until the age of eighteen. While in Australia young people must stay in full-time education until they are sixteen then they have to participate in additional training in order to achieve an upper secondary level qualification; however, young people do not have to remain in education or training if they gain full-time employment. This ensures that in Australia young people do not become NEET when leaving school. The problem with this approach, as Blanchflower (2000) argues, it simply delays the problem until, in Australia's case, a young person has completed their additional training.

While countries have adopted similar policies to that of England, the increase in the proportion of young people in education does not automatically lead to a reduction in youth unemployment. Indeed, Belgium, Poland and Ireland all have higher proportions of participation in post-compulsory education (OECD 2012, 15) but have higher levels

of youth unemployment (Maguire 2013). Fergusson (2013) suggests that the levels of youth unemployment in countries such as Ireland, Spain and Greece match the endemic extremes that have long characterised areas of North Africa and the Middle East. On the other hand, Kraak (2013) argues that, in South Africa, government policies designed to ensure young people can access training which will lead to employment, along with incentives for employers are having little effect. The policy in the UK is not a change to the school-leaving age, which is what happened in countries such as Italy and Belgium, but instead aims to encourage participation which will have a positive impact on individuals through their increased earning potential, and on the economy through sustained economic participation and, reducing the number of young people becoming NEET. However, changes in legislation mandating participation in education and training will only impact on the minority of individuals as approximately 95.6% of sixteen year olds participate in education, employment or training (DfE, 2014). A point which should be made here is that none of the countries examined have identified who is accountable for the implementation of their respective participation policies in the way that the UK has through its statutory guidance (DfE 2013).

In countries where sanctions exist for non-participation such as in the Netherlands where incremental fines for persistent offenders are used; or the parents of habitual truants are fined up to 500 dollars or imprisoned for up to 30 days; or, the suspension of an student's driving licence (USA); then the state is the enforcer, but not necessarily the accountable body. The lack of detail surrounding the accountability of an individual's country's participation policy may suggest that policy-makers have either not fully thought this element through, or are potentially unsure as to how the policy will be received by stakeholders, such as local authorities (districts) who would be required to enforce the policy.

A theme arising appears to be ensuring that young people enter occupational training linked to specific employment sectors. This linking of curriculum to employment is something that Wolf (2011) highlights as missing from the current UK system, whereby young people are studying '*meaningless qualifications that have little labour market value*' (2011, 7) or that '*fail to promote progression into stable paid employment*' (2011, 1). Maguire (2013) notes that while participation rates in education and training of sixteen to nineteen year olds looks impressive, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) average rate of participation in 2013 stood at 84% with the UK recording a participation rate of 78%, 6% below the OCED average (OECD 2014). By 2010 youth unemployment rates for 16-24 year olds across OECD countries had risen to record levels, although there was considerable variation between countries. The OECD average for youth unemployment was 16.3% with Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Japan and Norway all recording lower than average figures, with Spain and Greece recording a higher than average at 53.2% and 55.3% respectively. The UK not only has poorer levels of participation in education and training, but their youth unemployment figures were 21%, 4.7% higher than the OECD average. This suggests that if the UK is going to improve its position in the OECD ranking then changes to current policy directive are needed. By contrast Ireland, Poland and Belgium all had higher levels of young people participating in education and training, post-compulsory, but they were also reporting higher levels of youth unemployment (OECD 2013). What these figures suggest is that increasing the proportion of young people participating in education and training does not necessarily impact on youth unemployment rates.

The raising of the participation age in the UK

The former Labour government's rationale for raising of the participation age was based on the idea that traditional schooling may not be appropriate for all young people (Woodin et al. 2013). Therefore, if the aspiration of 100% participation is to be achieved, a range of options relevant to sixteen and seventeen year olds would be needed. The incoming Liberal-Conservative Coalition government adopted the former government's RPA policy but has focused less on re-engagement programmes, such as the Youth Contract, and more on moving young people directly into employment through apprenticeships (Rhodes, 2012) which benefited from an investment of £1.7b in 2013/14, and initiatives such as traineeships (which are often indistinguishable between work experience or volunteering). The UK government, unlike countries such as Australia, Italy and Belgium, has adopted a combined approach whereby young people will have to participate in education and training which has been defined as either full-time education, apprenticeships or full-time work, combined with part-time education or training (DfE 2013b).

The definition surrounding full-time education does acknowledge that for some young people aged sixteen to eighteen, who have been absent from the education system, a programme of re-engagement is necessary in order to progress into full-time education, currently defined as 540 hours per year. Programmes of re-engagement are not subject to any minimum hourly requirements and, for some young people, a graduated re-engagement provision is needed, increasing in hours throughout the duration of the programme. It is therefore possible for a young person to be participating in a re-engagement programme, thus meeting the statutory duty to participate, while remaining NEET due to the definitions used, which might suggest that the policy around participation and the one around NEETs are incompatible. Despite the duty to participate being mandatory, one year on from the start of raising of the

participation age, the percentage of sixteen year olds in full time education and training (the first cohort affected by the participation policy) only rose by 2.4% - from 83.5% to 85.9% (DfE, 2014), while participation in employment based training (such as apprenticeships) remained static at 3.2%. This paper questions the assumptions that underpin the government's participation policy, namely:

1. the yet unresolved tension between the RPA policy and the definition as to whether or not an individual is NEET; for an individual can meet the requirements of participation, but remain NEET;
2. evidence from OECD (2011) suggesting that extending participation post compulsory education may not reduce youth unemployment;
3. that the government's policy on mandatory participation has had little impact on the number of sixteen year olds remaining in education and training.

Further, if the raising of the participation age policy is unlikely to significantly reduce the number of young people classified as NEET (it will remove those young people aged 16-18 from claiming benefits, such as income support, housing benefit and Jobseeker's allowance) then is the policy needed? Glatter (2012) suggests that this need to improve the UK's position in the OECD ranking is a form of 'gaming' and is a response to the pressures of accountability but at a transnational level.

Factors impacting on learner participation

For young people achieving the expected five GCSEs at grades A* to C (at aged 16), opportunities for progression into school sixth forms, sixth form colleges (equivalent to a senior in the US high school system) or further education colleges (community colleges) are universally available. The changing education and economic landscape

does, however, mean that, increasingly even those young people who successfully progress to further and higher education are, upon completion, invariably returning to the family home and to dependent living with limited opportunities to secure sustainable employment (Tobin, 2009; ONS, 2012). Paradoxically, for some young people, the transition to adulthood (particularly the element highlighted by Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000, from school to work, or post-compulsory education) does not go as smoothly as expected. Failure to achieve the GCSE threshold creates what Hodgson and Spours (2013) refer to as an unprecedented crisis of opportunity for young people in England. Moreover, despite the current government's desire to raise young people's participation, the current policy context does not facilitate aspiration. Factors, including access to curriculum (particularly collaborative 14-16 provision with progression routes); the availability of impartial careers' education provided independently (through a greater reliance on schools and colleges to provide this service) (Parliament 2011); and the removal of direct monetary incentives for young people to remain in education and training, have all had a direct impact on learner participation. This is what Raffe (1998) describes as 'push-factors', pushing young people further away from participating in education. At the same time, the emerging policy of the diversifying ecology of secondary education with academies, free schools and trusts, emphasising institutional freedom, free markets and competition (DfE 2010) rather than one of collaborative working (Baird et al. 2010), has shifted the paradigm in which institutions operate. In this climate of increased competition, institutions have a vested interest in recruiting and retaining learners (as post-compulsory funding is predicated on learner numbers). This has the potential to limit access to impartial careers education and information advice and guidance with some young people possibly ending up on inappropriate courses. The importance of high quality

information advice and guidance has been highlighted nationally (DfE, 2014b) and internationally in order to support young people as they transition into adulthood (Kintrea et al. 2011; Symonds et al. 2011). This lack of high quality advice and guidance does have the potential to increase the proportion of young people not in education, employment and training at a time when youth unemployment is rising (DfE, 2011). Successive governments have continued the diversification of secondary education undermining the role of local government to one of monitoring service delivery and fostering collaboration rather than providing leadership, yet local government is expected to be accountable for participation under the RPA.

Not in Education, Employment or Training

As a consequence of mass youth unemployment Lee and Wright (2011) suggest that young people may well view post-compulsory education and training differently as the number of employment opportunities decline. While the youth labour market remains sufficiently depressed the characteristics of young people applying for the limited number of jobs has changed. The perceived stereotype of a NEET young person has changed significantly, so has the definition. Bynner and Parsons (2002) argue that NEET status has to be defined longitudinally, that is representing a period of time outside of education and training. They define NEET as being out of education, employment or training for a period of six months or more. Yet it is widely accepted across Europe that the definition of NEET status has changed to any period out of education, employment or training, (Eurofound 2012). Yet, young people are not a homogeneous group, and similarly, not all NEETs have become disengaged from the education system. An analysis of educational attainment of NEET young people in four local authority areas in the South East of England highlights the following:

NQF	percentage
Entry Level	8.36%
Level 1	27.96%
Level 2	30.11%
Level 3	3.82%
Level 5	0.12%
No Formal Qualifications	17.92%
Not Recorded	11.71%

Table 2. NEET Prior Attainment in 4 South East local authorities (districts) June 2013.

Table two illustrates that of those who were NEET at the end of June 2013, over a third (n=30 11%) had qualifications equivalent to GCSE A*-C grades (level 2), so if they continued in education they would be looking for level 3 (A-level or equivalent – see table one) provision, while 27.96% had level 1 equivalent qualifications (GCSE grades D-G), so would be looking to progress onto level 2 provision. Some of the young people who are currently NEET already hold level 3 qualifications (3.82%) so could gain entry to higher education, but arguably are potentially deterred by the costs of studying for a degree and fear a reversal of the current widening participation policy agenda, enabling only those with top A-level grades to gain access. Meanwhile, the UKCES (2011) continues to advocate higher-level apprenticeship as a viable alternative to traditional forms of higher education. Table two recorded 17.92% of young people having no formal qualifications, which as Bynner and Parsons (2002) note, is an important factor in avoiding the fringes of the labour market. There remain some young people who fit the profile suggested by Bynner and Parsons (2002), but there are many more that have higher levels of attainment, as illustrated by table two. Nonetheless, these young people continue to face challenges in obtaining suitable progression opportunities resulting from the net effect of a succession of policies which frame post-compulsory education.

Roberts (2011) observes that there are a category of young people that he calls the ‘missing middle’ which are those young people who are not NEET, but are in employment with no training. In terms of accountability, these young people are not participating as defined by the DfE (2013b) and they are not NEET as they are employed. Therefore, local authorities remain accountable under one policy but not another, further highlighting the tension between NEET and the RPA policy. Roberts (2011) goes on to suggest that supporting this middle group of young people is a particular challenge due to the ‘casualisation’ that characterises the industries in which jobs without training are located. In addition to the casual jobs individuals may frequently move in and out of shifting status from jobs without training to NEET, there is another emerging group who are in sustainable employment usually with major multi-national employers undertaking in-house training programmes that are not nationally accredited. Despite being on a structured programme of education and training, because it lacks national accreditation these young people will be classed as not participating. Indeed, should local authorities be sufficiently concerned with this group of individuals as they are not NEET? They are in sustained employment making an economic contribution, but at the same time they are distorting the perspective numbers participating. This challenges the robustness of data being publicised around participation and holding organisations accountable for the destinations of young people.

Enforcing the RPA policy

The Education and Skills Act (2008) places a statutory duty on local authorities to actively support the participation of young people. Indeed local authorities need to track and record the activities of all young people aged 16 and 17 in order to comply with this duty. Having identified young people not participating in education or training, the RPA

policy (DfE 2013) suggests that young people need to be supported to participate in education and training. However, local authorities have no power or sanctions over young people who do not participate or indeed their parents, guardians or employers who do not support a young person's participation. Despite being enshrined in the Education and Skills Act (2008), the power to sanction has not yet been enacted. The decision to delay enforcement, ostensibly to allow time for adjustment and to avoid criminalising young people (DfE 2010) means that there are no consequences for non-participation. As previously mentioned the legislation in some countries includes sanctions and enforcement measures; however, Spielhofer et al. (2007) suggest that there is very little evidence of the effectiveness of these sanctions. Notwithstanding, the Coalition government has promised to review whether it needs to use the enforcement aspect of the legislation to sanction young people. The additional responsibilities associated with both the current raising of the participation age policy or its enforcement come with no additional resources, and local authorities are expected to meet these new duties from within their existing capacity. Therefore, emphasis of the current RPA policy is that it is better for individuals if they voluntarily participate in education and training, recognising, for themselves, the benefits of continued education with the support being provided as necessary. For some young people however, their perception of the value of education and training is such that they do not wish to participate. So far, this paper has considered the government's aspirations of full participation in a policy context and has concluded that:

- the policy will impact a minority of individuals, due to the existing high levels of youth participation;
- that full participation will not necessarily lead to a reduction in youth unemployment;

- there are no sanctions (in the UK) for non-participation, unlike the Netherlands and the US;
- there remains a yet unresolved tension between participation and NEET due to the definitions used for both;
- the implementation of the policy comes with no additional resources;
- in its first year, the government's mandatory participation policy has had little impact on increasing participation of sixteen year olds.

This does present a number of challenges for those stakeholders who are held accountable for the implementation of this policy. It is these notions of accountability that will be explored in the remaining part of this paper.

Accountability

The rise of academies, free schools and trust status schools exemplifies the diversifying ecology of secondary education, accountability expectations and the broad diversion of control and funding away from local government (Leigh 2011; Woodin et al. 2013).

However, these developments are not new, but rather an acceleration of a trend that began in the late 1980s (Loughton 1996), with the Education Reform Act 1988. The Act redefined the relationship between local and central government, increasing Whitehall's centralised control over education while eroding local government's involvement in education and creating a regime of 'low trust' and increased accountability (Perryman et al. 2011). These reforms based on neo-liberal values of a quasi-independent system of autonomous schools responsive to consumer demand and competition, would, it was believed, improve the performance of schools by becoming directly accountable to service users. No longer could education be the 'secret garden' of an autonomous

professional community detached from public scrutiny: state funded education had to become publically accountable (Ranson 2003).

Poulson (1998) argues that few people would disagree with increased accountability being a good thing or that standards in education should be raised. However, accountability is a multi-layered concept defining a relationship of formal control between parties, one of whom is mandatorily held to account by the other. This locates accountability in a hierarchical bureaucracy, with teachers being accountable to the head teacher, who is accountable to the governing body and to the local authority if a maintained school, who is in turn accountable to the secretary of state for education. But, this paper argues that this rather simplistic view of accountability does not acknowledge the complexities of the relationships involved. If a teacher is accountable in this hierarchical bureaucracy one would assume they are also accountable to the parents regarding the progress of their child's learning, however, their first accountability must be to their employer. Following this line of argument, if teachers are held accountable should accountability be reciprocal with an expectation that parents and carers reinforce the learning process? Some would contend that this is already the case as parents are accountable for their children attending school as well as ensuring that their children's homework is completed on time through home-school agreements which they are required to sign at the start of each new academic year. In addition if pupils are persistent truants or taken out of school on holiday during term-time without permission, parents are held accountable through the threat of, or actual prosecution. Such complexity of accountability denies a simply linear hierarchical accountability framework. Yet accountability for implementation of RPA appears to be an over-simplified linear process with local authorities being accountable for all young people. Despite the complexities surrounding accountability and the prevailing need to

ensure the quality of public services, Ranson (2003) argues that the only way forward is for a system which is open and transparent. But how does the government's raising of the participation age policy sit within this notion of accountability?

Accountability Frameworks

Despite the constant talk of accountability and an extensive review of literature, little exists on frameworks that define accountability from a conceptual basis.

McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) state that accountability has become a fundamental feature of education policy in the UK, the US, Australia and New Zealand, however, there has been a move to an outcomes based measure, such as participation or the percentage of young people who are NEET. This is a departure from past notions of accountability that have focused on inputs, such as fiscal resources or compliance with rules and procedures. Anderson (2005) suggests that education accountability systems are multi-dimensional with three key facets: compliance and regulation; adherence to professional norms; and, results. McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) on the other hand suggest that there are only two dominant forms of accountability, Standards-Driven Accountability and Market-Driven Accountability. The difference between the current systems of accountability and those previously employed focus largely around the purpose of the systems and to whom they are designed for.

One of the elements of Anderson's (2005) model is the focus on compliance and regulation, for example, are state or local rules and regulations being adhered to? This is what McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) argue as input based accountability, rather than outcomes based which is where accountability frameworks seemingly have evolved to. This paper has already discussed the move away from local accountability due to the diversification of schools through the expansion of academies and the introduction of

free schools. As a result of this, state led regulation has increased as a mechanism by which quasi-autonomous institutions can be directed to continue to meet the political agenda of successive governments. This is an example of how the state has used input based accountability to meet its own political agenda. Yet despite the continued downgrading of the role of local government through the ideologies of successive governments, local authorities are still expected to ensure that all young people are compliant with the RPA regulations. This reinforces Anderson's first dimension and, emphasises the need for an element of input-based accountability despite the trend towards solely outcome based approaches to accountability.

Anderson (2005) also argues for accountability based on professional norms which focuses on standards in education. Currently this is monitored jointly through a state-led inspection regime conducted by the office for standards in education (Ofsted), and a government agency, the office of qualifications and examination regulation (Ofqual) who monitor and approve curriculum standards prior to being delivered in education settings. The publication of inspection reports and national performance data is what McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) and Glatter (2012) define as Market-Driven accountability, where there is an expectation that market forces such as choice and competition will in theory incentivise providers to improve standards. This is slightly different to Anderson's ideas which use outcome measures to judge standards rather than market forces. At the same time individual institutions are axiomatically responsible for standards and attainment through internal standards and attainment monitoring processes. Woodin et al. (2013) note that as a result of external accountability measures the local authority's role in education has been reduced to one of monitoring education rather than leading it. With current education policy relying heavily on this form of standards-based accountability, Peterson and West (2003)

question the assumptions underlying this type of framework and whether they just go to further marginalise young people, and thereby reinforce the Coalition government's shift in emphasis from one of re-engagement to one of outcome (such as engagement in apprenticeships or employment).

Another approach to accountability is the move towards a results driven system. Possibly the most publicised accountability measure, it seeks to make educators accountable for both student outcomes and progress (in national examinations) and, to the general public for institutional performance. This form of accountability is what McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) call outcome based accountability, yet Isaacs (2012) argues that new and changing accountability frameworks for schools and colleges are being introduced as a result of wider curriculum reforms. While these accountabilities are talked about as new, there is no clear distinction between what Isaacs suggests and results-driven accountability of Anderson's (2005) model and that of McLaughlin and Rhim (2007). Glatter (2012) suggests that results-driven accountability is the UK government's instrument of choice for control and uses the combination of subjective Ofsted inspections with graded outcomes, alongside performance tables which allow members of the public to compare institutions on purely statistical indicators. Similar systems are in place in many European countries. For example, in Germany, the Federal state implements a nationally regulated quality improvement system, whereas in Italy the shift has been made to a quality improvement system from an approach predicated on quality control. On the other hand, O'Neill (2002) argues that this may afford the government with an ease of measurement and control rather than an accurate measurement of performance. This element incorporates what McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) propose to be standards-driven accountability which measures the degree to which students meet performance expectations, and on its own creates an accountability

system purely based on assessments and moves education policy from one of social inclusion to one of social mobility. The combined use of performance indicators and narrative inspection reports provide an accountability system built around Anderson's (2005) three pillars, rather than the single-dimension approach proposed by other systems.

However, there are some potential challenges with the current system of accountability afforded to state funded institutions in England. First, Gilroy and Wilcox (1997) argue that the inspection process is fundamentally flawed, as it is a subjective process requiring a quantitative judgement to be made based on primarily qualitative data. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide an analysis of current inspection regimes from different countries but it is important to acknowledge that the system used in England is not without its critics (Perryman, 2007; Ball, 2003). Second, there is the risk of increased teacher stress through the preoccupation of strategies targeting borderline grade students in order to improve an institution's position in the performance tables (Perryman et al. 2011), what Glatter (2012) refers to as gaming. While Leckie and Goldstein (2011) argue that performance tables are not a reliable indicator of school performance, they acknowledge that the main purpose of constructing performance tables is for school accountability and contend that, instead of being the end result they should be used as a monitoring tool to identify areas for further investigation.

Whether accountability frameworks focus on one discrete area such as standards-driven accountability or market-driven accountability or try to combine a range of foci as adopted by Anderson's (2005) framework, they are each open to challenges around their appropriateness. McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) suggest looking beyond the detail of each framework and for consideration to be given to whether the

chosen framework fulfils its potential by improving outcomes for young people. Dyson et al. (2010) have argued that accountability should not be confined to one single dimension, be it input focused such as compliance or output orientated as in standards-driven or market-driven accountability, but instead be explicitly multidimensional, allowing for greater dialogue between all levels of the education system and with all interested stakeholders. This would require a significant departure from the currently top-down imposed system of control to one which processes elements of bottom-up and horizontal as well as top-down accountability.

Implementing the Raising of the Participation Age policy

As previously discussed the RPA policy is not about young people staying on at school but about the positive benefits of participation post-sixteen (Spielhofer et al. 2007; Oreopoulos 2006; and Leigh and Ryan 2005). Nonetheless, it is important to note Woodin et al's (2013) contention that following a traditional 'academic curriculum' at school may not be appropriate for all young people. Regardless of this, from September 2013, school performance tables will include details of the destinations of learners leaving institutions the preceding academic year. The measures will look at where learners, at age sixteen and eighteen, progress using the following headline categories: school sixth forms, sixth form colleges, further education, higher education, employment with training or NEET, thus making schools axiomatically accountable with local authorities for the destination of young people. Where schools have opted out of local authority control, the question of accountability and compliance with government leaver destination expectations remains problematic.

Implementation challenges for schools

The challenge facing schools is despite developing the plethora of strategies aimed at improving results in order to boost their position in performance tables, what Anderson (2005) describes as results based accountability and McLaughlin and Rhim (2007) call outcome based accountability. The new destination measures will make schools accountable for young people whom they potentially have no further contact with, while ensuring that learners are complying under the raising of the participation age legislation. The introduction of the new destination measures is an example of how the government is using Anderson's (2005) compliance and regulation dimension of accountability and McLaughlin and Rhim's (2007) input based element to enforce their policy on mandatory participation. This paper highlights the fact that the discourse needs to continue and advocates that institutions need to consider how best to address compliance with the raising of the participation age legislation, when their responsibility for some young people has ceased in the preceding July. Glatter (2012) and Waslander et al. (2010) argue that this form of performance indicator is a prime example of the government's use of decontextualised cold knowledge which ignores a range of contextual factors including geographic and socio-economic characteristics of the local area. As institutions grapple with this new accountability measure one may witness a further blurring of an institution's boundary in relation to the responsibility and accountability for young people when they are no longer participating in education at the institution. One solution may be to do nothing and assume that external services such as Connexions (local government funded provider of Information, Advice and Guidance), where they still exist, or the equivalent service, will be able to identify and support young people who are non-compliant with the raising of the participation age legislation. Under this 'do-nothing' arrangement the efficiency and effectiveness of the external organisation in supporting young people is reported against an individual

institution through the destination measures. An alternative is for institutions to proactively support young people's transition into further education or work, which Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000) highlight as one of the phases of a young person's journey to adulthood. This raises questions as to how far schools should extend their boundaries in supporting young people when they end their compulsory schooling and to what extent this support is welcomed by the young person (Coughlin and Maylor 2013)? Should schools consider developing role, within the organisation, that would have the responsibility to support young people who are at particular risk of disengaging and subsequently becoming NEET in order that their transition into post-compulsory education and training is as successful as possible. This idea of transitional support is no different to the plethora of strategies already use to increase student performance and subsequently boost an institution's position in the league tables. As such this is another gaming strategy (Glatter, 2012) which is designed to boost performance in the league tables while ensuring compliance with the raising of the participation legislation, which sits under two of Anderson's (2005) three dimensions of accountability: results driven; and compliance and regulation. Glatter (2012) argues however that this boosting of league position is how institutions are responding to the pressures of imposed accountability systems. The implementation of such a strategy would also place an element of responsibility on institutions for the destination of young people while making institutions accountable for the data published in school performance tables.

This paper suggests that institutions consider carefully the options available to them in supporting young people as they enter post-compulsory education and training. The introduction of destination measures places the accountability for young people's participation firmly on the educational provider. Schools have arguably two options to consider:

1. Continue to focus on young people up to the end of their statutory schools and abdicating responsibility for ensuring young people comply with government participation policy to external agencies; or,
2. Proactively engage with and support young people as they transition to post-compulsory education and training to ensure the sustained engagement in education, employment and training.

Only once the leadership team have considered these two options, in terms of the literature and argument put forward in this paper and the school economic and demographic context (particularly the number of students progressing from compulsory schooling to post-compulsory participation within the school), will they be able to make an informed choice as to which option is most suitable to their institution.

Implementation challenges for Local Authorities

It is not only education institutions that have a responsibility for the implementation of raising of the participation age policy, the statutory guidance (DfE 2013) places additional responsibility on local authorities to encourage and promote full participation as well as to establish the identities of young people who are failing to participate in education, employment or training (as defined by the DfE, 2013b). However, as previously stated, local authorities have no power to compel young people to participate as the element of the legislation referring to the enforcement of participation and criminalising non-participation was never enacted, making the additional responsibility for young people's participation largely theoretical. Local authorities are therefore, unable to sanction young people in a way that has happened in countries with similar policies. While local authorities have to report the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training on a monthly basis to the Department for

Education, some young people are unwilling to allow their data to be shared with organisations that can potentially support their transition into education, training or employment. This presents a significant barrier for local authorities in the range of support they can offer to young people, and makes the idea of full participation a potentially flawed concept, as there is a yet unresolved issue in terms of who is fully accountable for the participation of young people as no institution seems to have jurisdiction over this group of individuals. This subsequently prevents local authorities from achieving full participation, which is the government's expectation for young people aged sixteen to eighteen. If local government is expected to share the responsibility with educational institutions for full participation then the ideas presented in this paper around the transition support for young people needs to be considered to ensure that an effective way is found to support young people as they progress into adulthood.

Leaders in local government need to ensure that they are addressing the issues identified in this paper. Particularly the following:

1. How are the responsibilities for young peoples' participation shared with education providers given the diversification of the education landscape?
2. How can local government facilitate the sharing of young people's data in order to track and support participation. This is particularly important when as previously mentioned not all young people wish to share their data and sanctions for non-participation cannot be enforced.
3. How can mandatory participation be enforced without the any sanctions, thus reducing effectively making participation voluntary.

The continued discussion which this paper contributes to is important given that the additional duties placed on schools and local authorities come with no additional funding resources. If there were additional costs it is likely that the government would perceive this RPA strategy as unsustainable as it would add to rather than reduce their existing welfare budget used to support NEETs.

Conclusion

The issues presented in this paper around young people being NEET are not confined to the UK, with young unemployment rates in Ireland, Spain and Greece matching the endemic extremes which have long characterised areas of North Africa and the Middle East (Fergusson 2013). Maguire (2013) identifies the policy tension surrounding participation in post-compulsory education and levels of youth employment, suggesting that a prolonged period in education does not necessarily lead to a reduction in youth unemployment. Indeed Fergusson (2013) argues that NEETs exist as a consequence of transnational factors such as global divisions for labour, economic migration and national debt management strategies rather than as Simmons and Thompson (2013) suggest prolonged periods of education. This paper has highlighted the as yet unresolved tension between the raising of the participation policy and accountability, which remains problematic.

The raising of the participation age policy continuously highlights the need to be accountable for young people and suggests that schools should be accountable for the destination of young people. Yet accountability is more complex than the single outcome based element that the policy proposes. The complexities of multi-dimensional accountability require that education providers and local government consider how they support the implementation of mandated participation in a much more holistic manner.

Individual schools and local authorities will need to decide whether they do nothing in relation to accountability and compliance in implementing the raising of the participation age policy and hope that the destination measures data published in the performance table accurately reflects the potential of their young people, or seek to develop transition arrangements to support learners as they progress into other forms of non-school based education and training, as suggested by Coughlin and Maylor (2013). Unlike other papers which have provided a critical analysis of the raising of the participation and similar policies in an international context, this paper has sought to contribute to the discourse surrounding the raising of the participation age policy by suggesting that the accountability for the implementation of the policy is insufficiently developed. Until such a time when the issues presented in this paper are addressed, educational leaders are left with too many issues that need addressing as a result of the policy. While the paper has been unable to answer all the questions posed, it has however identified areas that need to be addressed by individual organisations in order to support the government's aspirations of full participation. Only by highlighting these questions and acknowledging that further work in this area is needed, can the raising of the participation age policy be successfully implemented.

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Table 1. Qualification levels

NQF	Example UK qualifications	Equivalent International qualifications
Entry Level	Foundation Learning Functional Skills at Entry Level	
Level 1	GCSEs grade D-G NVQ level 1	
Level 2	GCSEs grade A*-C NVQ level 2	O-levels
Level 3	AS/A-levels BTEC Nationals	High School Diploma (US, Canada) NCAE (New Zealand)

Table 2. NEET Prior Attainment in LOCATION June 2013.

NQF	percentage
Entry Level	8.36%
Level 1	27.96%
Level 2	30.11%
Level 3	3.82%
Level 5	0.12%
No Formal Qualifications	17.92%
Not Recorded	11.71%